

CHAPTER 42

Al-Shûrâ: The Counsel

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 5 *sections*; 53 *verses*)

This is the third chapter of the *Hâ Mîm* group, and is known as *The Counsel*. The title is taken from verse 38, which enjoins the Muslims to make it a rule to take counsel in all affairs of importance. The injunction lays down the basis of government by council or parliamentary government.

As regards the date of revelation and the context, see the introductory note to chapter 40. Having spoken of the consequences of the rejection of Truth in the last chapter, we are here told that Divine mercy is predominant over all other Divine attributes, and accordingly the first section tells us that even the act of warning is a merciful act on the part of the Divine Being, for He reveals His will through His prophets, while His angels solicit forgiveness for men. The second section states that Divine judgment is given to settle differences. The third shows that Allâh's dealing with men is just and no nation is destroyed unjustly. The fourth section calls attention to the fact that even the unjust are given respite, therefore, the believers must wait patiently. The last section states that the Qur'ân, being a revelation from the Divine Being, guides aright, hence those who do not follow its directions will find themselves in an evil plight.

SECTION 1: Divine Mercy in giving Warning

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 *Hâ Mîm*

2 *'Ain Sîn Qâf*

3 Thus does Allâh, the Mighty, the Wise, reveal to you, and (He revealed) to those before you.

4 To Him belong whatever is in the *samâwât* and whatever is in the earth; and He is the High, the Great.

5 The *samâwât* may almost be rent asunder above them, while the *malâ'ikah* celebrate the praise of their *Rabb* and ask forgiveness for those on earth.^a Now surely Allâh is the Forgiving, the Merciful.

6 And those who take protectors besides Him — Allâh watches over them; and you have not charge over them.

7 And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Qur'ân, that you may warn the mother-town and those around it,^a and give warning of the day of Gathering, wherein is no doubt. A party will be in the Garden and (another) party in the burning Fire.

5a. The significance is that the wickedness of human beings calls for immediate punishment, but the mercy of Allâh withholds it. The rending asunder of the *samâ'* is elsewhere used to signify Divine displeasure at the Christian doctrine of the divinity of "Jesus" (19:90, 91). The Divine displeasure at the wickedness of human beings is very great, but His mercy supersedes all. The *malâ'ikah's* prayer for forgiveness for human beings shows that Allâh Himself desires to forgive human beings. The deeds of human beings do not merit forgiveness, but forgiveness is the attribute of the Divine Being, and that Divine attribute is exercised through the solicitude of the *malâ'ikah*.

7a. *Umm al-qurâ* is Makkah, which is called the *mother of the towns* because it was destined to be the religious centre of the whole world; see 6:92a.

8 And if Allâh had pleased, He would surely have made them a single nation, but He admits whom He pleases to His mercy. And the wrongdoers have no protector nor helper.

9 Or have they taken protectors besides Him? But Allâh is the Protector, and He gives life to the dead, and He is Possessor of power over all things.

SECTION 2: Judgment is Given

10 And in whatever you differ, the judgment thereof is with Allâh. That is Allâh, my *Rabb*; on Him I rely, and to Him I turn.

11 The Originator of the *samâwât* and the earth. He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs of the cattle, too, multiplying you thereby. Nothing is like Him; and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.^a

12 His are the treasures of the heavens and the earth — He amplifies and straitens subsistence for whom He pleases. Surely He is Knower of all things.

13 He has made plain to you the Dîn (way of life as prescribed by Allâh) which He enjoined upon Nûḥ and which We have revealed to you, and which We enjoined on Ibrâhîm and Mûsâ and ‘Îsâ — to establish Dîn (way of life as prescribed by Allâh) and not to be divided therein.^a Hard for the *mushrikîn* (those who worship more than one Creator) is that to which you call them. Allâh chooses for Himself whom He pleases, and guides to Himself him who turns (to Him).

11a. So transcendent is the Divine Being, and so far above all material conceptions, that a likeness of Him cannot be conceived, even metaphorically. The words translated *like Him* literally mean *like a likeness of Him*. He is not only above all material limitations, but even above *the limitation of metaphor*.

14 And they were not divided until after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves. And had not a word gone forth from your *Rabb* for an appointed term, the matter would surely have been judged between them. And those who were made to inherit the Book after them are surely in disquieting doubt about it.^a

15 To this then go on inviting, and be steadfast as thou art commanded, and follow not their low desires, and say: I believe in what Allâh has revealed of the Book, and I am commanded to do justice between you. Allâh is our *Rabb* and your *Rabb*. For us are our deeds; and for you your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allâh will gather us together, and to Him is the eventual coming.^a

13a. Even so early did the Qur’ân announce that the religion preached by the Prophet was not a new religion, but, so far as its basic principles were concerned, it was the same religion as was preached by Nûḥ and Ibrâhîm and Mûsâ and ‘Îsâ. The basic principle of Islâm — entire submission to One Allâh only — is, in fact, the basic principle of the common religion of humanity.

14a. The personal pronoun *them* in *those who were made to inherit the Book after them* refers to the prophets. The people who were made to inherit the Book after the prophets, rejected the very message with which these prophets came. But they are told that their punishment is postponed till an appointed term. Such was the Divine law — *a word gone forth from your Rabb* — that the struggle against Truth gathers strength

at first and seems to have the upper hand for a time, but it ultimately comes to naught, thus showing that an unseen hand works in support of the Truth.

15a. The argument was so simple and sound. The Prophet told the followers of earlier revelation that he was a believer *in what Allâh had revealed of the Book*, in all revelation that came before him, and the basic principles of his revelation were the same as those of the earlier revelation. The whole thing was so clear that there could not be any dispute. There is a clear ray of hope in the concluding verses — *Allâh will gather us* — that they will ultimately accept the Truth.

16 And those who dispute about Allâh after obedience has been rendered to Him, their plea is null with their *Rabb*, and upon them is wrath, and for them is severe chastisement.^a

17 Allâh is He Who revealed the Book with truth, and the Balance;^a and what will make you know that perhaps the Hour is nigh.

18 Those who believe not in it would hasten it on, and those who believe are in fear from it, and they know that it is the Truth. Now surely those who dispute concerning the Hour are far astray.

19 Allâh is Benignant to His servants; He gives sustenance to whom He pleases; and He is the Strong, the Mighty.

SECTION 3: Allâh's Dealing is Just

20 Whoso desires the tilth of the Hereafter, We give him increase in his tilth; and whoso desires the tilth of this world, We give him thereof; and he has no portion in the Hereafter.

16a. The reference in *those who dispute about Allâh after obedience has been rendered to Him* may be to the followers of earlier revelation, because their books required obedience to a Prophet who should appear after them. Or, the meaning may be, after people have begun to enter Islâm, and Islâm has been established in the land notwithstanding the severest opposition.

17a. The construction is, Allâh revealed the Book and the Balance (Arabic, *mîzân*, balance or measure). The *balance* is that by which things are weighed. Elsewhere it is said: "Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear arguments, and sent down with

them the Book and the measure (*mîzân*), that men may conduct themselves with equity” (57:25). The purpose of revealing the *Balance* or *measure* is thus made clear here. It is that men may conduct themselves with equity; in other words that they may be able to carry out the ordinances contained in the Book justly. This is what the Prophet shows by his example. He is not only a preacher but also an exemplar. The ordinances of the Book are given in words, and the Prophet translates them into deeds, so that it is by following his example that human beings are led aright. The Prophet’s example is thus a balance or measure which is as essential for the right guidance of men as the Book. The word *mîzân* is generally taken here as meaning ‘*Adl* or *Justice*’ (*Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Imâm Abû Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarîr al-Tabarî), which would mean *the right use of the Book*, which is really shown by the Prophet himself, and thus indicates the Prophet’s example. According to others, the *Balance* here means the *Law* (*Anwâr al-Tanzîl wa Asrâr al-Ta‘wîl* (Commentary), by Qâzî Abû Sa‘îd ‘Abd Allâh ibn ‘Umar al-Baidâwî and the *Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu‘în al-Dîn ibn Safî al-Dîn) by which the rights and obligations of human beings are weighed. Mark how material terms are converted into devotional usage by the Arabic Glorious Qur’ân. A right realization of this point removes many of the difficulties in the study of the Divine Book.

21 Or have they associates who have prescribed for them any religion that Allâh does not sanction? And were it not for the word of judgment, it would have been decided between them. And surely for the wrongdoers is a painful chastisement.^a

22 Thou seest the unjust fearing on account of what they have earned, and it must befall them. And those who believe and do good are in the meadows of the Gardens — they have what they please with their *Rabb*. That is the great grace.

23 This it is of which Allâh gives the good news to His servants, who believe and do good. Say: I ask of you naught in return for it but love for relatives.^a And whoever earns good, We give him more of good therein. Surely Allâh is Forgiving, Grateful.

21a. The *word of judgment* indicates a judgment already pronounced that a respite will be given to the wrongdoers so that they may have an opportunity to reform themselves.

23a. Commentators generally think that the love enjoined here in respect of relationship signifies loving the offspring (*al*) of the Prophet, but there is nothing in the words which entitles us to place that limitation upon the words. The correct significance of the words is that *I ask of you naught in return for it; what I ask you is to love your own relatives*. The statement that the Prophet did not ask for any reward at all is made very often in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, and the preacher of virtue never asks for any reward. What he asked them was to live in peace and harmony with each other. The Arabs, closely related as they were to each other, were in a state of constant warfare. They are told to give up mutual warfare and to love one another. A somewhat similar statement is made elsewhere: "I ask of you naught in return for it, except that he who will may take a way to his *Rabb*" (25:57). In both cases what the Prophet wanted was not a reward for himself, but it was a good for the people themselves, being, in the second case, that they walk in the ways of Allâh or lead goodly lives and, in the first, that they love one another. Love of Allâh and love of human beings are thus the two essentials of religion taught in these two verses. According to some, however, *qurbâ* here carries the same significance as *qurbat* or *nearness*, and what it meant is to love the attainment of nearness to Allâh (*Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî).

24 Or say they: He has forged a lie against Allâh? So, if Allâh please, He would seal thy heart (against them).^a And Allâh blots out the falsehood and confirms the Truth with His words.^b Surely He is Knower of what is in the breasts.

25 And He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons evil deeds, and He knows what you do;

26 And He answers those who believe and do good deeds, and gives them more out of His grace. And for the disbelievers is a severe chastisement.

27 And if Allâh were to amplify the provision for His servants, they would rebel in the earth; but He sends (it) down by measure, as He pleases. Surely He is Aware, Seer of His servants.

28 And He it is Who sends down the rain after they have despaired, and He unfolds His mercy. And He is the Friend, the Praised One.

29 And of His signs is the creation of the *samâwât* and the earth and what He has spread forth in both of them of living beings. And He is All-powerful to gather them together, when He will.

24a. The sealing of the Prophet's heart cannot imply its being sealed against the Truth — Truth was being revealed to him — but the making of it secure against the abuse of his opponents, for they abused the Prophet and called him an impostor. This significance is, moreover, in accordance with the context, for by blotting out the falsehood and confirming the Truth, the abuses would be stopped, and thus his heart would be made secure against them.

24b. The words here imply the prophecies whose fulfilment would firmly establish the Truth.

SECTION 4: **Believers should be Patient**

30 And whatever misfortune befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought and He pardons much.

31 And you cannot escape in the earth, and besides Allâh you have neither protector nor helper.

32 And of His signs are the ships, like mountains on the sea.

33 If He will, He stills the wind so that they lie motionless on its back. Surely there are signs in this for every patient, grateful one,

34 Or He causes them to perish for what they have earned, and He pardons much;^a

35 And (that) those who dispute about Our messages may know. There is no refuge for them.

36 So whatever you are given is but a provision of this world's life, and that which Allâh has is better and more lasting for those who believe and rely on their *Rabb*;

37 And those who shun the great sins and indecencies, and whenever they are angry they forgive;

38 And those who respond to their *Rabb* and keep up prayer, and whose affairs are (decided) by counsel among themselves, and who spend out of what We have given them;^a

34a. The ship in these two verses is the ship of the affairs of the disbelievers, which was ultimately to be wrecked, yet Allâh dealt with them mercifully by pardoning most of the wicked things they did. The next verse makes the significance clear by drawing attention to the fact that the statement is a warning to *those who dispute about the messages of Allâh*, that they will find no refuge when their ship is wrecked.

39 And those who, when great wrong afflicts them, defend themselves.^a

40 And the recompense of evil is punishment like it; but whoever forgives and amends, his reward is with Allâh. Surely He loves not the wrongdoers.^a

41 And whoever defends himself after his being oppressed, these it is against whom there is no way (of blame).

42 The way (of blame) is only against those who oppress human beings and revolt in the earth unjustly. For such there is a painful chastisement.

38a. The occurrence in an early Makkan revelation of the words *whose affairs are decided by counsel among themselves* is very significant. The Muslims are here enjoined as usual to observe prayer and to spend out of what Allâh has given them. Yet between these two injunctions, which always go together in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, is placed a third: *whose affairs are decided by counsel among themselves*. It is clear that at this early period the Muslims had no important matters to decide for which they might have stood in need of counsel, yet between two injunctions which are the basis of a true Islamic life, a third is inserted enjoining that, as a rule, counsel should be taken. The injunction is clearly meant to prepare them for transacting the momentous affairs of State and all matters connected with national weal or woe. In fact, the word *amr*, which I have translated as *affairs*, means *command*; and *amr Allâh*, or *Allâh's command*, often signifies the establishment of the kingdom of Allâh, which stands for an Islâmic kingdom. The use of the word *amr*, therefore, here refers to the Islamic kingdom, the affairs of which must be transacted by counsel. In this Islâm has laid the basis of Government by parliaments, and the idea found a clear practical expression in the early days of the Caliphate, when the Khalîfah had to refer every important affair to counsel. It is strange indeed that Government by parliament is now looked upon by Europeans as an institution which is quite foreign to Islâm and unsuited for the Muslim people.

39a. *Intasara* alone signifies *he defended himself against his injurer* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane); followed by *min*, it signifies the taking of revenge. The first meaning is applicable here, as it is not followed by *min*.

40a. A golden rule relating to forgiveness of evil is given here. The rule laid down is that evil must be requited by punishment proportionate thereto. Note that punishment which is meted out for an evil is called a *sayyi'ah* or *an evil*, because the Arabs speak of the requital of an evil in terms of that evil; see 2:15a. Also note that the punishment must be proportionate to the evil. A very just and necessary restriction. And this beautiful maxim is given by a human being whose people were in the habit of slaughtering whole tribes for the most trifling fault of one member. Again, forgiveness is not neglected, nor preached in such a manner as to make it impracticable. There is in Islâm neither the one extreme of *tooth for tooth* or the opposite one of *turning the left cheek when the right is smitten* or *giving away the cloak to one who has already wrongfully taken the coat* of his brother; it is the golden and beautiful mean that forgiveness may be exercised, if forgiveness will mend the matter and do good to the wrongdoer himself. The object to be kept in view is to *amend*, whether it is attained by giving proportionate punishment or by exercising forgiveness.

43 And whoever is patient and forgives — that surely is an affair of great resolution.

SECTION 5: Revelation guides aright

44 And he whom Allâh leaves in error, has no friend after Him. And you will see the iniquitous, when they see the chastisement, saying: Is there any way of return?

45 And thou wilt see them brought before it, humbling themselves because of abasement, looking with a faint glance. And those who believe will say: Surely the losers are they who lose themselves and their followers on the Resurrection day. Now surely the iniquitous are in lasting chastisement.

46 And they will have no friends to help them besides Allâh. And he whom Allâh leaves in error cannot find a way.

47 Hearken to your *Rabb* before there comes from Allâh the day which there is no averting. You will have no refuge on that day, nor will it be yours to make a denial.

48 But if they turn away, We have not sent thee as a watcher over them. Your duty is only to deliver (the message). And surely when We make human beings taste mercy

from Us, he rejoices thereat; and if an evil afflicts them on account of what their hands have sent before, then surely human beings is ungrateful.

49 Allâh's is the kingdom of the *samâwât* and the earth. He creates what He pleases. He grants females to whom He pleases and grants males to whom He pleases,

50 Or He grants them both males and females, and He makes whom He pleases, barren. Surely He is Knower, Powerful.^a

51 And it is not vouchsafed to a mortal that Allâh should speak to him, except by revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger and revealing by His permission what He pleases.^a Surely He is High, Wise.

52 And thus^a did We reveal to you an inspired Book^b by Our command. You knew not what the Book was, nor (what) Faith (was), but We made it a light, guiding thereby whom We please of Our servants. And surely you guide to the right path —

50a. The birth of a daughter was looked upon by the Arabs as a calamity (see 16:58, 59), this being due to the low position which women held in society. The wonderful change brought about by Islâm in the status of woman is clearly foreshadowed in this early revelation, where the daughter has the precedence over the son.

51a. This verse shows how Allâh speaks to a person or makes known His will to him. Three modes of this are stated: (1) by *wahy*, which word is generally translated as meaning *revelation*. The primary significance of the word *wahy* is, however, a *hasty suggestion*, and since the different kinds of revelation are spoken of here, the meaning intended must be the primary significance of the word. Hence the inspired word, which enters the hearts of the prophets and of the righteous, is called *wahy* or *revelation*, because it is like a hasty suggestion made directly to the heart of the inspired one, *ilqâ-'un fi-l-rau'i*. It is in this sense that a revelation is spoken of as being granted to the mother of Mûsâ (28:7), and to the apostles of 'Îsâ who were not prophets (5:111). (2) The second mode of Allâh's speaking to His servants is that He speaks from behind a veil — a scene is shown as in a vision carrying deeper significance, or words are heard by the person spoken to as from behind a veil. (3) The third form of revelation is that in which a messenger — a *malik* — is chosen by the Almighty to deliver His message to the person to whom He wishes to speak. This is the highest form of revelation, and such is the revelation of the Qur'ân as granted to the Holy Prophet, being recited to him through the medium called *Jibrîl*. This is called

wahy matluww or *revelation that is recited*. This revelation is granted only to prophets, while the other two may also be granted to the righteous, who are not raised to the dignity of prophethood. It should, however, be borne in mind that in all these cases the recipient of the revelation is granted certain other senses. He sees what others do not see and he hears words which others do not hear. It is, therefore, with what may be called the religious senses that he hears and sees and feels things which others do not hear, see, or feel.

52a. *Thus* refers to the last mode of granting revelation, because the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân is spoken of as having been brought by the *Malik Jibrîl* (2:97) or *the Faithful means of communication* (26:193).

52b. The use of the word *rûh* ("inspired Book") as meaning *inspiration*, and not the *soul*, is conclusive here. The Qur'ân is called the *rûh* or *the Divine revelation or communication*, because it gave life to a dead world. It is dead again, and again will life be breathed into it by the Qur'ân.

53 The path of Allâh, to Whom belongs whatsoever is in the *samâwât* and whatsoever is in the earth. Now surely to Allâh do all affairs eventually come.